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Israeli-Arab Authors Claiming Hebrew Identity: The Case of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua

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Israeli-Arab Authors Claiming Hebrew Identity: The Case of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua

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Abstract

Israeli-Arab Authors Claiming Hebrew Identity: The Case of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua

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Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua present two very different examples of Israeli-Arab authors writing in Hebrew. They belong to different generations, utilize different styles and media, and hold different reasons for writing in Hebrew. Yet, these two authors share some goals. Both seek to represent Israeli-Arab stories for a Hebrew-speaking audience by writing in Hebrew. I argue that Shammas and Kashua use different strategies to make their work palatable to this Israeli audience, and both succeed in securing a wide readership, despite the critical nature of their writing. In this thesis, I look at the different approaches they adopt to gain entrance to mainstream Israeli discourse. Shammas uses elevated Hebrew and writes in a sophisticated style that renders his work unimpeachable. Kashua uses humor, sarcasm, and absurdity to appeal to readers and utilizes popular media such as television and journalism. Despite their vastly different approaches and styles, both critique Israeli centers of power in their writing and manage to engage the dominant culture by using the language of the majority.

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Introduction

Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua are Israeli-Arab[1] authors who write in Hebrew rather than their native Arabic. They have different reasons for writing in Hebrew, however, and use the language in different ways. The two belong to different generations and utilize different media and styles. For these reasons, Shammas and Kashua are often analyzed separately or in contrast to one another, rather than examples of the same phenomenon. In this thesis, I will argue that despite their differences, both use Hebrew to gain access to mainstream Israeli discourse and criticize centers of power in Israeli society. I will analyze the different approaches they have taken to gain acceptance and acclaim in Israel while criticizing it. Shammas uses elevated Hebrew that is beyond reproach, while Kashua relies on humor and sarcasm. While they each use different strategies, both succeed in making their work palatable enough to the dominant culture that it is accepted and widely read.

Shammas and Kashua strike a delicate balance between critical and acceptable in their work. In much of their writing, the critiques of Israeli power structures come through intimate personal reflections on Israeli-Arab identity from the characters' perspectives. By writing in Hebrew, Shammas and Kashua represent Israeli-Arab experiences for an Israeli-Jewish readership. Though their styles are very different, both are aiming their critiques at this population.

[1] I am using the term "Israeli-Arab" to denote Arab citizens of Israel with Palestinian origins, although some people who fit this definition may prefer other terms such as Arab-Israeli or Palestinian-Israeli.

I will begin by contextualizing Israeli-Arabs' relationship to Hebrew through education and culture. I will also look at the lives of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua up to this point for their similarities and differences and where they fit within their respective generations. Chapter One will analyze their choices to write in Hebrew and their different motivations for this choice. Chapter Two will focus on their different styles and approaches and how they find success in different ways, while Chapter Three will show that Shammas and Kashua share some goals and make similar critiques in their work. I will look closely at the literature of these authors as well as their reception in Israel to draw connections between them in spite of their differences.

LANGUAGE IN ISRAEL

Hebrew became the sole official language of the State of Israel with the passage of the "Jewish Nation-State Law" on July 19, 2018, which relegated Arabic from official status to an ambiguous "special" status. Of the many languages spoken in Israel today and since before its establishment, Hebrew is the only one determined by the state to represent its national identity. This national identity, according to the state, is necessarily Jewish. Today, however, many non-Jews in Israel claim Hebrew as their native language. It is important to understand the role of Hebrew in cementing the Jewish cultural hegemony in Israel to understand the significance of the choice that Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua make to write in the language.

The Zionist movement, which arose in the late 1800s, sought to solve the problem of the Jews as they saw it: that they lacked a state of their own. One national language

was considered essential for the unity of the state Zionists wanted, as opposed to the patchwork of diaspora languages that new Jewish immigrants brought with them. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, often credited as the father of modern Hebrew, strongly advocated for Hebrew as the key element of Jewish national revival from as early as 1879.[2] The two crucial aspects of Jewish national rebirth, in his view, were "the soil and the language, each of which cannot exist without the other."[3] By 1914, the Zionist movement named Hebrew its official language and as early as 1919, 39.9 percent of Jews in Palestine spoke Hebrew as their principal language.[4] Hebrew played a major role in coalescing the Jewish national identity that Zionists wanted.

In constructing the new, modern Hebrew language, difficult choices needed to be made. The choice of Hebrew, first of all, amounted to the rejection of other languages.[5] The Zionist program rejected the influence of Yiddish and other diasporic languages on modern Hebrew and as a result, the languages of the diaspora were looked down upon.[6] Up until the formation of the state, Yiddish was seen as an anti-Zionist threat to Hebrew and the goal of Jewish statehood.[7] Additionally, the language needed one official accent. Ashkenazi accents were reminders of exile, and thus the Sephardic accent was adopted

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[2] Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing Between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 26.
[3] Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 153.
[4] Boaz Neumann, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 153.
[5] Bernard Spolsky, "Hebrew and Israeli Identity," in *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa,* ed. Yasir Suleiman (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 186.
[6] Levy, *Poetic Trespass,* 30.
[7] Spolsky, "Hebrew and Israeli Identity," 187.

for its perceived authenticity to the original Hebrew pronunciation.[8] Hebrew was essential in creating a new Jewish identity, one that rejected its history of exile in every way.

The revival of Hebrew into a modern language, and the official language of the State of Israel, happened in such a way to bind the Hebrew language to the Jewish national identity. This process rendered Hebrew "an ideological barrier that separated and segregated Israeli Jews from both the Arab and the Diaspora Jew."[9] Despite the roots of the language and its intertwinement with Judaism and Zionism, many Israeli-Arabs use Hebrew in all aspects of their life and even speak it as their native tongue, claiming it as their own. Israeli-Arabs have been told that the Hebrew language does not belong to them, while simultaneously receiving education in Hebrew and using it in to engage with the world around them. As a result, the relationship of Israeli-Arabs to Hebrew, which represents the "Israeli" part of their hyphenated identity, remains a source of complication and sometimes contradiction in their identity. Therefore, the choice of prominent Israeli-Arab authors to write in Hebrew, is an intriguing act in itself.

Education plays an essential role in Hebrew hegemony in Israel. Teaching Hebrew to new Jewish immigrants was essential in cementing the new Israeli-Jewish identity in the early days of the state. Hebrew education for Israeli-Arabs, however, served a different purpose. When the State of Israel was established, it kept Arabic as the second official language beside Hebrew. Arabic was the language of instruction in

[8] Arieh Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 72.
[9] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 115.

schools with a majority of Arab students but required Hebrew education as well, starting in the fourth grade, but today schools begin as early as kindergarten.[10] Israeli-Arabs hold a variety of attitudes toward their mandatory Hebrew education. Some view it as forcing them to assimilate into mainstream Israeli culture by replacing their own language and culture education; some understand Hebrew education to be practical as a medium of communication in society; yet others argue that Hebrew gives Israeli-Arabs a voice and allows them to participate in the state.[11] Of course, all three of these can be true at once.

It is important to consider the primary intention of the state in mandating Hebrew education for its Arab minority. Muhammad Amara, a sociolinguist at Beit Berl College in Israel, argues that the goal of teaching Hebrew to Israeli-Arabs is "to promote Israelization among the Palestinian Arab minority in order to bolster loyalty to the state."[12] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, a professor of Jewish studies at the University of Wisconsin, similarly asserts that the Zionist state imposed Hebrew on its Arab citizens and that this process "was modeled upon the colonialist practices of the West."[13] Increased Hebrew class time, for Israeli-Arab students, comes at the expense of Arabic language and cultural education. Amara finds that there is an emphasis on Jewish culture and Zionist ideology in the Hebrew curricula and teaching materials that are used in Israeli-Arab schools.[14] In this way, Arab culture is, to some extent, overshadowed and replaced by Israeli-Jewish culture in the classroom.

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[10] Muhammad Amara, *Arabic in Israel: Language, Identity and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2017), 70.
[11] Ibid, 71.
[12] Ibid, 72.
[13] Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 71.
[14] Amara, *Arabic in Israel*, 75-76.

Hebrew education is crucial in binding Israeli-Arabs to the state. The Ministry of Education and Culture emphasizes the importance of Hebrew not only for everyday communication, but also for pursuing higher education and finding work.[15] This framing shapes language attitudes in Israel among both Jews and Arabs. Hebrew is seen as the more prestigious language, one that opens doors and creates opportunities for Israeli-Arabs to achieve success. Ultimately, Hebrew is necessary for engaging with the state and participating in mainstream public discourse in Israel. As the cases of Shammas and Kashua demonstrate, Hebrew allows Israeli-Arab authors to enter the Israeli-Jewish discourse and to critique the state using the dominant language.

ANTON SHAMMAS: ENCOUNTERS WITH HEBREW

The lives of Shammas and Kashua contain important similarities as well as major differences. I will provide a brief biography of each author, beginning with Shammas, to contextualize their work and their choice to use Hebrew. Anton Shammas was born a citizen of Israel in 1950 to a Christian family in the Arab village of Fassuta in the Galilee, where he lived for his first twelve years.[16] In the 1948 War, two years before he was born, the village became part of Israel but the Arabs were not expelled from there, as was the case with many other Arab villages.[17] Themes of village life and family ancestry feature prevalently in Shammas's novel *Arabesques*. Growing up in an entirely Christian

[15] Ibid, 73.
[16] Avraham Balaban, "Anton Shammas: Torn Between Two Languages," *World Literature Today* 63, 3 (1989): 418.
[17] Gerald Marzorati, "An Arab Voice in Israel," *The New York Times Magazine* September 18, 1988.

village shaped his identity and his relationship to both the Palestinian community and the Israeli Jewish community from a young age. He says:

> I suppose to fundamentalist Arabs I've sold out…because I don't want to see Israel become a state that begins with 'P,' they would say it's because I'm a Christian. And I suppose the Jews too – well, many of them will say, because they very much want to believe it, that they can deal with the Christians as they cannot with the Muslims. But the truth is just this: I am an Arab trying to live here, trying to live as a real Israeli.[18]

The Christian aspect of his identity affects not only how he perceives his Palestinian-ness and Israeli-ness, but also how he is perceived by these two groups. Shammas himself, however, rejects the stereotypes surrounding his religion. He seems to consider these generalizations as baggage, holding him back from fully realizing his Israeli identity.

When Shammas was twelve years old, his family moved from the small Christian village to the mixed Israeli city of Haifa.[19] He went to a school with both Jewish and Arab students, where the language of instruction was Hebrew.[20] It was there that Shammas's Hebrew education began. Before moving to Haifa, he possessed only a small amount of functional Hebrew knowledge, or "survival Hebrew."[21] In a New York Times interview, he tells a story of being humiliated while trying to buy sunflower seeds when he first moved to Haifa. He could not understand that the Jewish storekeeper was asking him in Hebrew if he wanted them with or without salt, and a smug Arab girl his age laughed at him; the experience made him vow to one day know Hebrew better than either

[18] Anton Shammas in Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[19] Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 418.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.

of them.[22] It is clear that he fulfilled this vow. *Arabesques* has been lauded by Israeli critics for Shammas's mastery of the Hebrew language and his ability to incorporate traditional and modern Hebrew texts.[23] While his lack of Hebrew knowledge was a source of shame for the young Shammas, his command of Hebrew a few decades later garnered praise and became a source of pride.

In 1968, when he was seventeen, Shammas moved to Jerusalem to attend the Hebrew University, the most prestigious school in Israel at the time.[24] He did not feel that he fit in, being one of very few Arab students there and being a few years younger than the Jewish students, who had served in the army for a few years by that point.[25] He took classes through 1972, studying English literature and art history, but never graduated.[26] It was during his college years that he began writing poetry, both in Arabic and Hebrew. In 1974, he published both a Hebrew collection of poetry *(Hardcover)* and an Arabic one *(Prisoner of Wakefulness and Sleep)*.[27] After this collection, most of Shammas's work has been in Hebrew, including his next collection of poetry, *No-Man's Land* (1979), and his only novel *Arabesques* (1986). In addition, Shammas has translated a great deal of poetry and fiction between Hebrew, Arabic, and English, including that of Emile Habiby and Mahmoud Darwish. Today he is a professor of modern Middle Eastern literature at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His work has had a profound impact on

[22] Ibid.
[23] Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 419.
[24] Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] The Hebrew title of *Hardcover* is *Khrikha Kasha* and the Arabic title of *Prisoner of Wakefulness and Sleep* is *Asir Yaqzati wa Nowmi*. See: Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 419.

Hebrew literature in general, especially for other Israeli-Arab authors. Shammas's unapologetic representation of himself as fully Israeli, creating a space for Israeli identity separate from Jewishness, resonates with many Israeli-Arabs.

SAYED KASHUA: THE ABSURDITY OF ISRAELI-ARAB IDENTITY

Sayed Kashua represents one of the most well-known, if not always well-liked, Israeli-Arab voices in contemporary Israel. According to Dana Olmert, an Israeli activist and professor of literature, Kashua is "the only Israeli-Arab who has been broadly accepted by the Jewish-Israeli mainstream."[28] Nevertheless, he still receives criticism from both Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis for his work, his politics, and his choice to write in Hebrew. As a journalist, columnist, screenwriter, and author, Kashua has produced a great deal of content, mostly based on the fraught identity he shares with other Israeli-Arabs. By utilizing irony and humor in his writing, he is able to represent Israeli-Arab identity in all of its absurdity. He uses Hebrew to write stories that disrupt, criticize, and mock the mainstream Israeli-Jewish perceptions of Israeli-Arabs, as well as reflect the confusion Israeli-Arabs themselves feel about their identity.

Sayed Kashua was born in 1975 in the Israeli city of Tira, which has a high concentration of Israeli-Arabs and is adjacent to the Green Line border between Israel and the Palestinian territories.[29] In 1990, at the age of 15, he was admitted to a very

[28] Dana Olmert, "Is Perfect 'Passing' Possible? Nationalism and Gender in the Writings of Sayed Kashua, *Middle Eastern Literatures* 21, 1 (2018): 60.
[29] Batya Shimony, "Shaping Israeli-Arab Identity in Hebrew Worlds – The Case of Sayed Kashua," *Israel Studies* 18, 1 (2013): 148.

prestigious Israeli boarding school in Jerusalem.[30] Before this, Kashua was not accustomed to being the only Arab in a majority Israeli-Jewish environment, and was surprised by the way he was treated in Jerusalem. He recalls this story:

> On my first bus ride, a soldier got on and immediately pegged me as an Arab: a boy leaving his village for the first time, with an Arab's clothes, an Arab's thin moustache, and most tellingly, the frightened look of an Arab. That was the first time I was taken off the bus and searched. It took me a while to blur my external identity.[31]

While at school, he learned to act and look more Israeli and less Arab, and he immersed himself in the Hebrew language.[32] Kashua's experience in boarding school confronted him with the contradictions of his hyphenated identity. Although he was Israeli by citizenship, he still needed to assume this Israeli (Jewish-Israeli) persona to get by in society. He found that the Arab part of his identity eclipsed and nullified the Israeli part, so he had to hide the Arab part in order to pass for a Jewish-Israeli, part of the majority.

In Kashua's work, all of his protagonists are Israeli-Arabs and most of them attempt to pass as Jewish in one way or another. This theme of concealing part of one's identity, emphasizing another part, or just entirely fabricating part, comes from Kashua's own experience as an Israeli-Arab living, studying, and working in Jerusalem. Kashua intimately understands the profound crisis of identity that Israeli-Arabs face in their day-to-day lives. When Kashua realizes that he is treated one way when he is perceived as

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[30] Adia Mendelson-Maoz and Liat Steir Livny, "The Jewish Works of Sayed Kashua: Subversive or Subordinate?, *Israel Studies Review* 26, 1 (2011): 108.
[31] Sayed Kashua in Debra Kamin, "The Greatest Living Hebrew Writer is Arab," *The Tower Magazine* 3, June, 2013.
[32] Debra Kamin, "Greatest Living Hebrew Writer," 2013.

Arab but another way when he is perceived as Jewish, it creates a sense of dual identity. He plays with this notion in his work, where his characters assume different identities, switch back and forth between them, or even steal others' identities. Interestingly, as we will see, Kashua's protagonists are rarely named. All of them represent some aspect of himself and are all autobiographical to an extent. The idea of an Israeli-Arab passing as Jewish provides a thread between Kashua's stories and his real life.

Kashua studied sociology and philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.[33] He started to work as a journalist and became well-known for his "provocative" weekly column in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* even before he began writing novels.[34] The column is based on his own life and experience as an Israeli-Arab and how his identity affects how he sees the world and is seen by others. He uses humor in his columns to call attention to the absurdity of his identity and his existence as an Israeli-Arab in an Israeli-Jewish dominated state. Kashua's columns have earned him widespread popularity in Israel. He published a collection of them as a book, *Ben Haaretz,* in 2014 which was translated into English as *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life* by Ralph Mandel in 2016. Kashua also uses humor in his Israeli sitcom *Arab Labor (Avodah Aravit)* which premiered in 2007. Like his column, the show is enjoyed by many Israelis, especially Jews. *Arab Labor* brings stories of Israeli-Arabs and their private lives into the awareness of Israeli Jews in a way that no TV show has done before. In addition to his sitcom and his columns, Kashua has written four novels,

[33] Mendelson-Maoz and Livny, "The Jewish Works," 109.
[34] Gil Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be an Israeli Arab: Sayed Kashua and the Prospect of Minority Speech-Acts," *Comparative Literature* 62, 1 (2010): 69.

all in Hebrew. His first, *Dancing Arabs*, was published in 2002, followed by *Let It Be Morning* in 2004, *Second Person Singular* in 2010, and *Track Changes* in 2017.

Kashua lived with his wife and three children in Jerusalem until 2014. In that year, Hamas militants kidnapped and killed three Israeli teenagers and Israeli settlers killed and burned a Palestinian boy and a new round of fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas. It was this event that made Kashua decide to move his family to the United States, where he served as a visiting professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign from 2014 through 2018.[35] He believes that the United States is a better place for his children to grow up. He explains:

> I see how much the kids are happier, I guess, here and I think they might have a better future not hiding. I couldn't lie anymore to my kids telling them that they are equal citizens of Israel. They cannot be equal because in order to fit in and be accepted and to be a citizen of Israel, you need a Jewish mother.[36]

In Israel, Kashua's children faced racism and discrimination in schools and had to contend daily with their contradictory identity. He did not want his children to continue living this experience that he had to endure, though part of him feels like he surrendered by leaving Israel.[37]

Sayed Kashua is unapologetically confused about his identity. This confusion is reflected in all of his work, in mundane and absurd ways. He rejects the strict binary of

[35] Sayed Kashua, "'It's A Surviving Tool': 'Native' Tells Satirical Stories of Life in Israel," Interview by Kelly McEvers, *National Public Radio,* February 12, 2016.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

identity in Israel, where "You're either Arab or Jewish…and there is no place for individuality."[38] He says:

> I discovered that I can be confused, and belonging to this community of Palestinian citizens of Israel, we don't deserve to be blamed of being confused. Just the definition of being an Arab, Palestinian citizen of a Jewish state is enough to make you confused or make you have a different identity, some people call it problematic, and that is something I am trying to deal with.[39]

Kashua comes from a Muslim Palestinian family, he has tried to pass for Jewish before and he feels more comfortable writing in Hebrew than in Arabic. All of these are components of his identity but no one thing defines him. There is no single prefabricated national identity into which he fits, and the process of figuring out his own unique identity, somewhere between Israeli and Palestinian, Jewish and Arab, is confusing. Similarly, he rejects the binary of culture and language and the hierarchy between "one's 'own' cultural possessions and those 'borrowed' from the other."[40] Though he may be criticized for his choice to write in Hebrew, he does not accept the suggestion that it is either better or worse, more or less authentic, to use Hebrew instead of Arabic.

Important differences distinguish the lives of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua. First, unlike Shammas, Kashua does not favor poetry as a medium and has never published his work in Arabic. As we will see in the following chapters, Shammas's work is defined by its elevated Hebrew and postmodern style while Kashua's is defined by its

[38] Sayed Kashua, "The Born Identity: An Interview with Sayed Kashua," Interview by Alice Greenberg, *The Paris Review*, April 29, 2013.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be," 82.

humor and absurdity. In addition to literature, Kashua also utilizes more popular media like television and opinion columns. Kashua represents a younger generation of Israeli-Arabs. Compared to Shammas, Kashua is more assimilated into Israeli-Jewish culture.[41] Another difference between the two is that Kashua is Muslim, while Shammas is Christian. Whereas Shammas feels that his religion creates another wedge between him and the Arab part of his identity, Kashua's religion causes suspicion among Israeli-Jews and alienates him from the Israeli-Jewish identity he wished to emulate as a teenager. Though Israeli-Arabs are often treated as a homogenous category, religion is one factor that affects how they are perceived by the Jewish majority. All of these elements influence the different reception of these two authors in Israeli culture.

The lives of Shammas and Kashua present important similarities as well. Most relevant is that both struggled with the in-betweenness of their Israeli-Arab identity from a young age. Both were forced to confront this conflict when they entered a mixed or Jewish-dominated environment where their identity became more salient. Both attended the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where they felt like they did not fit in, and both ultimately moved to the United States. Despite their different experiences, Shammas and Kashua both use Hebrew to critique the culture and state in which they came of age. Their use of Hebrew allows them to have a voice in a culture where they belong to a marginalized minority. This in addition to other strategies (such as humor for Kashua), lets them tell their stories to the Israeli-Jewish majority, where they are both well received. Next, I will look how their similarities and differences affect their respective

[41] Shimony, "Shaping Israeli-Arab Identity," 150.

choices to write in Hebrew. I will also touch on the choices that other Israeli-Arab authors have made to write in Hebrew and their reasons for doing so. What is the nature of Israeli-Arabs' relationship to Hebrew, how does it inform these authors' decisions, and how should their literature be classified within Israeli and Hebrew literature more broadly? I turn to these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter One: Israeli-Arab Authors Claiming Hebrew Identity

Considering the connection between Hebrew and Jewish identity, what does it mean for non-Jews in Israel to claim Hebrew as their native language? In this chapter, I will examine the choice of Israeli-Arab authors to express themselves in Hebrew. Why do they choose to write in Hebrew and what does this choice reveal about the relationship between language and identity in Israel? How does Hebrew serve the goals of authors like Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua, who write critically about the state with which Hebrew is so entangled? While there are multiple reasons for Israeli-Arab authors to choose Hebrew as their means of expression, the effect of this choice is important as well. For Arab writers to claim Hebrew as a medium is to undermine the notion that Hebrew belongs only to Jews. Hebrew is at once an essential component of Israeli-Jewish nationalism as well as a medium of Israeli-Arab resistance, which some authors use to challenge the dominant national identity.

ISRAELI-ARAB IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIP TO HEBREW

The identity of Israeli-Arabs is notable for its profound sense of being in-between. Not fully belonging to either of its two component identities, the Israeli-Arab identity can be characterized by its contradictions. Adia Mendelson-Maoz states that "there is…an unresolved tension between being Palestinian by nationality, and being Israeli by

citizenship."[42] Israeli-Arabs are often seen by both the Israeli state and the Palestinian community as not being fully loyal. The choice of Israeli-Arab authors to write in Hebrew is often viewed as cultural treason by Palestinians.[43] Israeli-Arab authors like Shammas and Kashua reckon with these complexities and contradictions in their work. Writing in Hebrew, Lital Levy argues, these authors occupy an "in-between" space, "outside the ethnocentric domain that equates Hebrew with 'Jewish' and Arabic with 'Arab.'"[44] Peter Clark describes this phenomenon as "an example of an interaction between Arabic and Hebrew culture…that defies mainstream Arab and Israeli ideologies."[45] In-betweenness is essential to the Israeli-Arab identity and to the literature produced by this group.

Anton Shammas exemplifies the profound conflict of the Israeli-Arab identity. Inhabiting a space in between two cultures, two languages, and two national identities, Shammas uses in-betweenness to inspire his work. While he has published poetry in Arabic before, most of his work, including his only novel, is in Hebrew. As an Israeli-Arab author of Hebrew, he undermines the Jewish identity of the language and the state by carving out a piece of Israeli identity for himself. In his own words:

> In Israel, on your actual identity card, there is a space for nationality, and in this space you are 'Arab' or Jew.' Now with my novel I was trying to prove – to myself, in writing it, as much as to anyone who might read it – that there is

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[42] Adia Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014), 16.
[43] Peter Clark, "Marginal Literatures of the Middle East," in *Literature and Nation in the Middle East,* eds. Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 187.
[44] Levy, *Poetic Trespass,* 3.
[45] Clark, "Marginal Literatures," 187.

> something which I think of as Israeli, which is not a matter of Arab or Jew, but a matter of living in a place called Israel.[46]

The desire to create an Israeli and Hebrew identity that is separate from Jewish identity comes through in Shammas's work.

Even though Israeli-Arabs often hold strong Palestinian connections, their Israeli citizenship shapes their identity in equally powerful ways. Through education and socialization, the Israeli state influences the language, culture, politics, and identity of Israeli-Arabs, binding them to the state itself.[47] The Hebrew educational system is key in shaping Israeli-Arab identity. This education system imposed on Israeli-Arabs, however, does not automatically grant them entrance into mainstream Israeli Jewish society.[48] Rachel Feldhay Brenner argues:

> Ironically, the domination of Hebrew language, culture, and education produced a situation of colonial mimicry that…effectively divested the Arabs of their cultural distinctness and at the same time distanced them from the dominant mainstream. As Hebrew-speaking, culturally colonized, second-class citizens, Israeli Arabs have remained on the threshold, suspended between cultures and national identities.[49]

Education in Hebrew plays a major role in creating connections between Israeli-Arabs and the State of Israel. This also ties them to the Hebrew language itself from a young age. Their education in Hebrew is a central factor in shaping nuanced feelings towards the language.

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[46] Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[47] Mishael Maswari Caspi and Jerome David Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening: Culture and Identity of Arab Israeli Literati* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1998), 22-23.
[48] Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 70.
[49] Ibid, 70-71.

Israeli-Arab authors have different relationships to Hebrew – some see it as an occupying language while others regard it more fondly as their native language, or they experience both feelings at the same time. For some Israeli-Arabs, it can be a language of occupation. To the Israeli-Arab author Anton Shammas, Hebrew symbolizes "the cultural hegemony enforced by the majority."[50] At the same time, Hebrew can be an intimate part of Israeli-Arabs' identity. To the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, Hebrew is also the language of some of his friendships, childhood memories, and love.[51] The conflicted nature of the hyphenated identity of Israeli-Arabs is represented in their often-conflicted feelings toward the Hebrew language. We can see this conflict of identity in the choice of Shammas and Kashua to write in Hebrew and in the resulting literature.

CHOOSING HEBREW

Both Shammas and Kashua, Arab citizens of Israel who studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, have chosen to produce their work in Hebrew. To some, this choice seems obvious. Based on their backgrounds and education, why would they write in any language but Hebrew? In fact, this decision can be attributed to a multitude of factors, which I will examine closely in this section. Some factors are related to convenience, linguistic ability, and readership, while other reasons are decidedly political, seeking to subvert the dominance of the majority Jewish-Israeli culture. For

[50] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel*, 29.
[51] Rachel Feldhay Brenner, "The Search for Identity in Israeli Arab Fiction: Atallah Mansour, Emile Habiby, and Anton Shammas," *Israel Studies* 6, 3 (2001): 91-92.

Israeli-Arab authors, the decision to write in Hebrew is at once practical, profound, and disruptive.

When looking at the choice of Israeli-Arabs to write in Hebrew, it is important to look at the alternatives. They can write in Arabic, the language of their family heritage and their native language; they can write in Hebrew, the language of the majority; or they can remain mute.[52] There are downfalls to each option. Writing in Arabic preserves the author's heritage but limits readership in the Hebrew-dominated culture, whereas writing in Hebrew can be seen as accepting the politics associated with it and "adopting the teleological Zionist narrative to which Hebrew is integral."[53] Either choice is fraught with complications, but the authors discussed here have chosen Hebrew. Levy considers the phenomenon of Israeli-Arabs writing in Hebrew an act of cultural trespassing.[54] This begs the question, how can writing in a language one uses every day, possibly one's native language, be considered trespassing? Israeli-Arab authors experience different degrees of comfort writing in Hebrew, some feeling more at home in the language than others. They come to choose Hebrew with a variety of motivations and considerations, and they deal with the consequences of this choice differently as well.

For some Israeli-Arab authors, the choice to write in Hebrew is first and foremost a political one. For others, however, practical concerns such as linguistic ability and readership come into consideration. While I choose to focus on Shammas and Kashua in this thesis, other Israeli-Arab authors of Hebrew can reveal a great deal about what goes

[52] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel,* 25.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Levy, *Poetic Trespass,* 3.

into making this linguistic choice. Atallah Mansour wrote the first Hebrew novel by an Arab (*In a New Light,* 1966) and worked as a journalist for *Haaretz*.[55] He belongs to the generation before Shammas's and identifies strongly with both the Palestinian and Israeli parts of his identity. Brenner argues that part of the reason why he and Shammas wrote in Hebrew was to be read by an Israeli Jewish audience.[56] Both of their novels are highly critical of Zionism and the Israeli state. Mansour reveals that "his decision to write in Hebrew stemmed from the desire to obtain vengeance by means of a critical novel."[57] Ayman Sikseck is an Israeli-Arab literary critic and author who found success with his 2010 Hebrew novel *To Jaffa*. He belongs to a new generation of Israeli-Arab writers, but reflects continuity with previous generations, those of Mansour and Shammas. Sikseck believes that "since Israeli discourse is conducted in Hebrew, only writing in Hebrew can be deemed part of this discourse."[58] Writing in Hebrew allows Israeli-Arab authors to be read widely by the population and culture that they are actively criticizing, thus disrupting it. This is a stated goal of Mansour, Shammas, and Sikseck. To write in the language of the majority, for these authors, is to disrupt the majority culture and claim to be part of it.

Shammas's choice to write in Hebrew arose from complicated feelings towards his native language, Arabic. Writing in both Hebrew and Arabic helped Shammas understand the different nature of his relationship to each language. His two languages

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[55] Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded,* 112.
[56] Ibid, 111.
[57] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel,* 27.
[58] Ibid, 26.

occupied different parts of his identity and affected his writing process in different ways. Shammas felt limited by the Arabic poetry scene in Israel, which was cut off from the rest of the Arab world; the kind of modernist poetry he wanted to write, he thought, would not be accepted by the Arabic poetry outlets in Israel.[59] When he began working on *Arabesques* in 1976, he wrote the first chapter in Arabic but could not get any further.[60] He decided to write in in Hebrew, because, he recalls: "You cannot write about the people whom you love in a language that they understand; you can't write freely. In order not to feel my heroes breathing down my neck all the time, I used Hebrew."[61] Writing *Arabesques* in Hebrew gave Shammas an element of distance from the novel's subject matter, which in turn allowed him to write more freely. While Hebrew can be understood by Israeli-Arabs as the language of the oppressor, representing Israeli-Jewish cultural dominance, Shammas regards it in this case as the language that gives him the most freedom.

For telling some stories, like *Arabesques,* Shammas considers Hebrew the appropriate vehicle, both for his ability to tell the story and for the story's potential readership. To his fellow Arabs who criticize his choice to write in the language of the majority, he says: "I'm telling their story to the audience that should listen to the story in their own language."[62] In the eyes of Shammas and other Israeli-Arab authors who write in Hebrew, Arab stories need to be heard, understood, and absorbed in mainstream Israeli

[59] Shammas in Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[60] Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[61] Shammas in William H. Gass, "Family and Fable in Galilee," *The New York Times,* sec. 7, April 17, 1988.
[62] Ibid.

culture, which is dominated by Jewish stories and has been for decades. While Arabic is Shammas's mother tongue, he considers Hebrew his "stepmother tongue."[63] With *Arabesques* and his other Hebrew work, he is emphasizing his claim on the language.

Kashua, on the other hand, chooses to write in Hebrew because his knowledge of literary Arabic is not strong enough. Having received a full Hebrew education, Kashua feels comfortable in the language. Because most of his life and his daily experiences have taken place in Hebrew, it was a natural choice for Kashua to write in it.[64] He wants to tell the stories of Israeli-Arabs and to create an equal space for them within Israeli identity. Writing in Hebrew allows him to interrupt and occasionally shock the mainstream Israeli culture that tries to marginalize him and other minorities in Israel. Kashua also addresses the practical concerns of writing for this population. He says that writing in Hebrew is preferable and more feasible due to the dominance of Hebrew publishers in the marketing and distribution of literature in Israel.[65] This concern, in addition to his lack of confidence in his literary Arabic, influenced his decision to write in Hebrew. Even though these motivations are not as obviously political as those of authors like Shammas, this is not to say that Kashua's work lacks political content. As the following chapters will show, Kashua indeed criticizes the mainstream Israeli-Jewish culture and subverts its stereotypes.

Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua do not constitute the entirety of Israeli-Arab Hebrew literature. I selected these two authors because they represent change as well as

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[63] Shammas in Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[64] Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be," 82.
[65] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel,* 32.

continuity over generations, from Shammas who was born shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel and wrote mainly in the 1970s and 80s, to Kashua who was born in the 70s and has published a novel within the last ten years. Born in 1984, almost 10 years after Sayed Kashua, Ayman Sikseck represents a younger generation of Israeli-Arab authors. Hebrew is more comfortable for him than Arabic, both as a spoken language and a literary medium. While Arabic is his mother tongue, he calls Hebrew his "stepmother tongue," like Shammas.[66] Similar to Kashua, he feels, to an extent, assimilated into Israeli culture and removed from his Palestinian roots. He remarks:

> I am not producing Palestinian literature: it's in Hebrew. I find myself within Hebrew and carve out my place through it. Maybe I am distancing myself from my Palestinian identity like this, but I am also returning to it from a different direction, through the mediation of Hebrew. It's like getting lost and then finding your way.[67]

Sikseck is pushing the boundaries of what constitutes Hebrew literature and finding a voice for himself in Israeli society. He finds that writing in Hebrew has "made him exist" in Israel, where Hebrew is necessary to engage in mainstream discourse.[68] Sikseck's experience shows continuity with that of Shammas and authors before him, while also revealing the unique challenges Israeli-Arabs face today in terms of their identity, their sense of belonging, and their sense of in-betweenness. Whether issues of convenience or ideological motivations cause Israeli-Arabs to write in Hebrew, the products of this choice actively challenge conceptions of what it means to be Israeli and what it means to

[66] Judith Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way Into Existence: A Window Into the Arab-Israeli Experience," *The Jerusalem Post,* September 1, 2016.
[67] Doron Halutz, "Language Is My Anchor," *Haaretz* April 11, 2010.
[68] Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way," 2016.

claim Hebrew as one's own. Hebrew allows Israeli-Arab authors to speak directly to the dominant culture that they seek to criticize.

CLASSIFYING ISRAELI-ARAB HEBREW LITERATURE

Where do Israeli-Arab writers fit into the modern Hebrew literary tradition? Should their work be considered Israeli literature, and is it an example of minor literature? This section seeks to answer these questions by contextualizing these Israeli-Arab authors within the modern Hebrew canon.

As modern Hebrew was implemented as the national language of the Jewish people, Hebrew literature became an important aspect of that national culture. Like the modern Hebrew language itself, Hebrew literature helped to solidify the Jewish national identity. However, not all literature produced in Hebrew feeds this nationalist narrative. Israeli-Arabs as well as Jewish ethnic minorities in Israel, such as Middle Eastern and Ethiopian Jews, do not neatly fit into the narrow Zionist construction of Israeli-Jewish identity.[69] The literature written by members of these groups in Hebrew pushes the boundaries of the traditional Hebrew canon.

The beginning of modern Hebrew literature came with the Haskalah period. The Haskalah, or Enlightenment, from 1781 to 1881 saw a flourishing of Hebrew literature in Europe. Hebrew served as the vehicle for this movement because it held more prestige than Yiddish, which was considered a corruption of German that emphasized Jewish

[69] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel,* 3.

cultural inferiority.[70] The Haskalah movement aspired to redefine Jewishness and used Hebrew as its medium. Haskalah efforts to create a new Jewish identity laid the foundation for the later Zionist efforts to create a new Jewish community in Palestine, and Hebrew was central to both movements.[71] It was during the Haskalah that Hebrew became a literary language and the issue of Jewish identity came into question.

The Modern Period (1881-1917) of Hebrew literature arose from the previous century of Haskalah literature. This period was characterized by a shift away from the Haskalah's emphasis on the social backwardness of the Jewish people towards a more balanced understanding of Jewish history and culture.[72] During this time, Hebrew literature began to evolve into a national literature. Zionism provided not only an inspiration for some of the Hebrew literature of this period, but also a growing market and readership for this literature.[73] A strong Hebrew literary canon was a key element of the Zionist movement's goal of creating a national culture. For literature to serve this purpose, it needed to be written in Hebrew, rejecting any linguistic remnant of exile in diaspora. Hannan Hever, a professor of Hebrew language and literature at Yale, claims: "Hebrew fiction was institutionalized and canonized within the context of Zionist culture, a culture that itself rebelled against Jewish existence in the Diaspora, which it perceived

[70] Ezra Spicehandler, Tova Cohen, Yaffah Berlovitz, Avner Holtzman, Anat Feinberg, and Gershon Shaked, "Modern Hebrew Literature," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. Vol. 8 (Macmillan Reference, 2007), 686.
[71] Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew*, 88.
[72] Spicehandler et al., "Modern Hebrew Literature," 692.
[73] David Aberbach, *Major Turning Points in Jewish Intellectual History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 175.

as subservient and inferior."[74] Just as linguistic influence of diasporic languages was avoided in the Hebrew revival, so it was rejected in the canonization of Hebrew literature.

The construction of Hebrew literature in the Zionist project entailed the suppression of alternative narratives of Jewish experience and of minority voices.[75] According to Hever, creating a national Hebrew literature entailed an "active attempt of a Jewish Zionist national minority to constitute a utopian, imagined community poised to become a national majority."[76] In the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language, Hebrew was used as a political tool to forge a unified national identity. With the creation of the Hebrew literary canon, Hebrew also became an artistic instrument for cultural nationalism and expression.[77] These parallels show that both the canon of Hebrew literature and the Hebrew language more broadly were deliberately established as pillars of Zionist Jewish nationalism.

With this history in mind, the choice of Israeli-Arabs to express themselves and produce work in Hebrew becomes more complicated. Should the Hebrew work of Israeli-Arab authors be considered part of Israeli literature, Palestinian literature, or no national literature at all? How do Israeli-Arab authors reckon with their choice to take part in a literature that helped build the Israeli state which they aim to critique? Shammas and Kashua criticize Israel within the confines of its own national literature, carving out a space for themselves inside it.

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[74] Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5.
[75] Ibid, 2.
[76] Ibid, 9.
[77] Aberbach, *Major Turning Points,* 188.

As I have shown, the development of a modern Hebrew literary canon was deeply tied to Zionism and curated to emphasize the Jewish national identity of the state. Because of this, Hebrew literature and Israeli literature are often incorrectly conflated into one category. Any literary works written in Hebrew can be considered Hebrew literature, but can those of Israeli-Arab authors be considered Israeli? Brenner argues that the authors' Israeli citizenship defines their literature as Israeli, though others claim that their Palestinian roots make it Palestinian literature.[78] Ayman Sikseck asserts that he does not produce Palestinian literature, because it is in Hebrew, but he does not believe this negates his Palestinian identity.[79] Anton Shammas also claims that he could not write an Arab novel because he is Israeli and thus not of the Arab world.[80] These are two examples of Israeli-Arab authors who think of their work as belonging to Israeli literature. They are creating an Israeli identity that has nothing to do with Judaism, an identity than can belong to the Arab minority while still being distinctly Israeli.

Mendelson-Maoz asks whether Israeli-Arab works in Hebrew ought to be conceived of as minor literature.[81] As defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a minor literature is "that which a minority constructs within a major language" and the language in it must be "affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization."[82] Minor literatures are also, by definition, political and hold collective value.[83] By this definition,

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[78] Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 4-5.
[79] Halutz, "Language Is My Anchor," 2010.
[80] Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.
[81] Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel*, 25.
[82] Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Dana Polan, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.
[83] Ibid, 17-18.

Israeli-Arab literature in Hebrew can be considered minor literature. The deterritorialization of language, in particular, is a stated goal of some Israeli-Arab authors, like Shammas. He has asserted his intent to "un-Jew" the Hebrew language, claiming it as his own and thus undermining the exclusive Israeli-Jewish hold on it.[84] Israeli-Arab authors who write in Hebrew occupy a unique space in Israeli literature. Hebrew allows them to create a space where their voices can be heard. In the next chapter, I will show how Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua adopt different approaches towards producing literature for a Hebrew-speaking Israeli audience that allow each of them to find success and gain acceptance into mainstream Israeli discourse.

[84] Anton Shammas, "Your Worst Nightmare," *Jewish Frontier* 56, 4 (1989): 10.

Chapter Two: Strategies for Acceptance

Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua have both found success and acceptance in Israeli society through their work. The strategies they employ to do so, however, differ greatly. Shammas's impressive command of literary Hebrew and his postmodern style brought him high praise from Israeli critics. Kashua's humor helps to make his work more palatable to his Israeli audience. In this chapter, I will look at textual examples that show the different approaches adopted by Shammas and Kashua to penetrate the mainstream Israeli discourse and reach a wide readership.

ELEVATED HEBREW AND POSTMODERN NARRATIVE IN *ARABESQUES*

Arabesques, published in Hebrew in 1986 and translated to English by Vivian Eden in 1988, remains Shammas's only novel. I am basing my analysis of the novel on Eden's English translation. She worked closely with Shammas himself to produce this English version and to render an "allusive and layered kind of Hebrew" accessible to English readers.[85] The book was well received in Israel, where it quickly became a bestseller and was praised for Shammas's command of Hebrew.[86] The prominent Israeli writer Amos Oz called it "a triumph, not necessarily for the Israeli society, but for the Hebrew language."[87] Israeli critics were impressed not only by Shammas's Hebrew but also by his incorporation of Jewish sources and modern Hebrew texts, and considered

[85] Anton Shammas, *Arabesques* [Arabeskot], Trans. Vivian Eden (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Note on the Translation.
[86] Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 419.
[87] Amos Oz in Muhammad Siddiq, "The New Question: Who Is an Israeli?: Arabesques by Anton Shammas," *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1988.

Arabesques a fundamentally Israeli novel.[88] *Arabesques* was also named one of the seven best fiction books of 1988 by the New York Times.[89] While this was not the first Hebrew novel written by an Israeli-Arab, it was still considered groundbreaking. Hannan Hever asserts that through *Arabesques*, "the ostensible identification of Hebrew literature with Jewish ethnicity was broken in an unprecedented manner."[90] The lasting impact of Arabesques is its problematizing of traditional associations between Jewish and Hebrew and between Arab and Arabic. The book is autobiographical to an extent and deals with the many questions and contradictions of Shammas's Israeli-Arab identity.

This kind of elevated Hebrew contributed to the reception of *Arabesques* as a literary masterpiece. For Shammas, writing in Hebrew was not as important as writing so masterfully that he cemented his status as a great Israeli writer, on a level with Amos Oz and other Hebrew literary giants. This allowed him to definitively claim Israeli identity for himself, paving the way for authors like Sayed Kashua. The Hebrew Shammas used in *Arabesques* was beyond reproach, forcing the Israeli culture to recognize and accept his novel as a work of art, rather than dismissing it as a politically motivated critique with no literary merit. This is one of the ways in which Shammas gained entrance to the dominant literary culture and appealed to Israeli readers.

Another factor that allowed Shammas to be received favorably by literary critics is his postmodern style, evidenced most clearly by the complicated narrative structure of *Arabesques.* The structure of the novel reflects its title, which refers to the Arabian

[88] Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 419.
[89] See "Christmas Books; Editors Choice: The Best Books of 1988," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1988.
[90] Hever, *Modern Hebrew Canon*, 9.

artistic decoration characterized by intertwining patterns of lines twisting and turning around each other.[91] Shammas plays with time and space in such a way that the reader may become disoriented. The two main component parts of the novel are "The Tale" and "The Teller." The former presents the story of the Shammas family, from their roots in the Galilee in the nineteenth century, through their lives in Fassuta through 1948 to the present in the 1980s. The latter focuses on the journey of the present-day narrator, Anton Shammas himself, from Israel to Iowa City to participate in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. The novel alternates several times between these two related stories. Even within each part, however, time does not follow a linear path. In "The Tale," the narrative jumps from Shammas's own childhood memories, to descriptions of family members who died before he was born, and jumps again to an excursion with his friend in 1981, all in the space of a few pages. "The Tale" does not linger on one story or even one time period for very long at all. "The Teller" is more linear, relating Shammas's journey to Iowa roughly from beginning to end, although sometimes changing in perspective to other characters in the story and representing certain events out of temporal order. Ultimately this narrative structure creates a sense of distrust in the reader, alienating him from the story as Anton Shammas himself, in the book, eventually becomes alienated from his own story.

The thrust of the novel comes from the narrator Anton Shammas's journey to find his identity, through finding his long-lost cousin after whom he was named. Born in 1950 (like the real Shammas), the narrator was named after his cousin, Anton Shammas, the

[91] Ibid, 186.

son of his uncle Jiryes and his wife Almaza, who had died as a baby in 1929. Jiryes was living in Argentina when the baby died, and Almaza was overcome with grief, which followed her throughout her life. "The Tale" reveals that in 1980, Shammas learned from someone who used to live in the village that the baby Anton Shammas was alive and well. He had not died in 1929 but rather he was taken and adopted by the Abyad family and had been living under the name Michael Abyad. This sets in motion the main storyline of the novel. The narrative eventually culminates in the reunion of the two Anton Shammases in Iowa City.

At the end of the novel, Shammas meets his cousin Michael Abyad, who then gets the opportunity to tell his own story. He says that Almaza, his real mother, was actually his maid and he grew up hearing stories of her dead son, Anton, with whom he felt a strong connection. He later learned of a new Anton Shammas, our narrator, who had been named after the dead child. He identifies with him so strongly that he decides to write a fictional autobiography of the living Shammas, whom he had never met. He tells Shammas: "I decided to write my autobiography in your name and to be present in it as the little boy who died."[92] Thus it is revealed to the reader that "The Tale" all along was a fictionalized version of Shammas's autobiography based on stories and imagination, written by his cousin who was thought dead. Abyad gives the autobiography to Shammas, saying "Take this file and see what you can do with it. Translate it, adapt it, add or subtract. But leave me in."[93] The book ends with the narrator's musing that if

[92] Shammas, *Arabesques*, 258.
[93] Ibid, 259.

Michael Abyad were "the teller," he "might have finished with a paraphrase of Borges: 'Which of the two of us has written this book I do not know.'"[94] The ending leaves the reader doubting whether any of the narrative was true, who wrote it and who the "real" Anton Shammas is.

Shammas has mentioned the Russian nesting doll, or babushka doll, as a symbol of the "multifaceted issue of identity in Israel."[95] The doll represents the many layers of the complicated identity of the Israeli-Arab minority, in which religion, nationality, and language all play a part. Avraham Balaban observes that this babushka imagery can be applied to the narrative of *Arabesques*, where it is easy to lose track of stories within stories and unreliable narrators. He summarizes:

> Anton Shammas, the Christian-Arab-Israeli writer, writes a novel in Hebrew; within the fictitious borders of the novel Anton Shammas's autobiography is not told by Shammas himself but by one Michael Abyad, yet Abyad's story is not necessarily believable, since it is a secondhand story whose gaps are filled through Abyad's own imagination. Furthermore, Abyad's story about the identity of the narrator of 'The Tale' – Michael Abyad disguised as Anton Shammas – is called into doubt, since Anton Shammas is portrayed as someone who conceives of his world through literary lenses and plays with inventing fictitious characters.[96]

The story is designed to obscure the true identity of the narrator, Anton Shammas. As an Israeli-Arab, he already exists in an undefined space where aspects of his identity – his language, his nationality, his politics – are scrutinized from both sides. Shammas

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Balaban, "Anton Shammas," 420.
[96] Ibid.

highlights this in-betweenness and sense of confusion around his own identity in this puzzling story.

Shammas's choice to write a complicated postmodern narrative is another factor that makes *Arabesques* more palatable to an Israeli audience. Literature has a different effect on its readers than other media. A sophisticated novel of this type comes does not come across as threatening, despite its potent criticism. A novel like *Arabesques* is seen first and foremost as art, owing to its elevated Hebrew and challenging narrative style. Thus, it has received praise and acclaim from its Israeli audience in spite of its criticism of the Israeli state and culture. Next, I will look at how Kashua's techniques differ from Shammas's. Kashua uses different strategies to find acceptance and success, opting for a sarcastic approach and more accessible media like television and journalism. Ultimately, as I will show in Chapter Three, both succeed in being read and widely accepted in Israeli culture.

HUMOR AND ABSURDITY IN THE WORKS OF SAYED KASHUA

Unlike Shammas, who uses an elevated register of Hebrew and a sophisticated literary style, Kashua appeals to a wider readership by writing in a more accessible style and using elements of sarcasm and absurdity in his novels. Additionally, Kashua uses more popular media such as his television show *Arab Labor* and his weekly column in *Haaretz* to reach a greater number of Israelis. In this section I will discuss his use of sarcasm and humor in his column and television show, in addition to the wildly absurd nature of some of his novels.

Kashua's column in *Haaretz* has brought him widespread popularity in Israel. Most of his columns are funny snippets of his everyday life that often involve his interactions with other Israeli-Arabs and with Jews or feature members of his family, who grapple with the same identity issues as he does. Kashua uses humor to address serious subjects. In one column, he relates an argument with his wife over whether or not to circumcise their son, which he is strongly against. She asks, "So you want our son to be different?" to which Kashua replies: "You mean to tell me that circumcision is what's going to keep him from being different? He's an Arab, for God's sake."[97] Kashua's humor allows him to deal with controversial topics in a way that is subversive but does not come across as threatening to his Israeli-Jewish readers.

Kashua is also well known for his comedic television series *Arab Labor*. The name of the show refers to the negative Israeli-Jewish stereotype that work done by Arabs is of poor quality. One of the themes of the show is his subversion of common Israeli stereotypes of Arabs. Many Israeli-Jewish viewers love the show, although they may choose to ignore Kashua's satirical criticism of Israel's treatment of Israeli-Arabs.[98] Gil Hochberg, a professor of comparative literature at UCLA, writes that *Arab Labor* targets "the figure of the liberal, leftist, and 'open-minded' Israeli Zionist who fails to recognize his/her own racism."[99] On the other hand, Israeli-Arabs accuse him of portraying them as stereotypes.[100] Kashua purposely uses popular stereotypes of Israeli-

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[97] Sayed Kashua, "Loving One's Son Just as Nature Made Him – Uncircumcised," in *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life,* Trans. Ralph Mandel (New York: Grove Press, 2016), 205.
[98] Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be," 69.
[99] Ibid, 85.
[100] Olmert, "Is Perfect 'Passing' Possible?" 61.

Arabs in order to subvert them and reveal the hypocrisy of mainstream Israeli culture.[101] The sarcasm and jokes make the show more acceptable to Israeli Jews who watch it, but may have the unintended affect of obscuring his criticism.

The humor in Kashua's fiction comes in the form of absurd situations. A good example of this is his short story "Herzl Disappears at Midnight," published in *Haaretz* in October 2005. It was translated to English by Vivian Eden in 2006 and published as "Cinderella." The main character of the story, Herzl Haliwa (an Israeli Jew), has a mystical affliction that causes him to turn into an Arab from midnight to sunrise. His mother "begged God for a son, even if he was born half Arab," and Herzl was born on Rosh Hashanah.[102] During the night, he knows Arabic and not a word of Hebrew, and during the day he knows only Hebrew. His childhood was marked by "nights when he would wake up frightened, feeling something different, knowing he had dreamt in a different language, one that he only spoke at night and completely forgot by morning."[103] Now, he spends his nights with his Arab friends and plans protests against the occupation. Every night, Herzl becomes a different person on the inside, "with different feelings, different fears, different hopes."[104] In order to prove this to his Jewish girlfriend Noga, he stays with her all night and brings her along to all the spots he visits when he is Arab. In the morning, after she witnesses the transformation of Herzl into an Arab activist and then back into the man she knows, she asks: "What's going to happen with this

[101] Debra Kamin, "Greatest Living Hebrew Writer," 2013.
[102] Sayed Kashua, "Cinderella," Trans. Vivian Eden, *Words Without Borders,* December, 2006.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

whole Arab story?" and Herzl replies in the last line of the story: "If you ask me, they can all go up in smoke."[105]

This story takes the concept of the dual identity of Israeli-Arabs to an absurd place. Herzl is cursed to live two full lives as two completely different people. Each of his identities falls on opposite poles of the spectrum of Israeli identity. They are both well-defined and represented in Israeli culture. The story shows how Israeli-Arabs can sometimes feel that they possess two contradictory identities trapped in one body.[106] While Herzl's case is pushed to a supernatural extreme, this story of living a double life resonates with many Israeli-Arabs.

The most absurd part of the story is the two halves of Herzl's identity have absolutely no bearing on one another. He remembers who he is after the transformation and does not lose his memories when he transforms back. However, as we can see by the concluding line of the story, his nights in the company of Arabs immersed in their struggle have not changed his Jewish self's prejudice against them. His two identities are so compartmentalized that they do not affect each other whatsoever. Language in the story is another element of this compartmentalization. Herzl can either only speak Hebrew, or only speak Arabic, but he never knows both languages at the same time. This story gets to the essence of the identity crisis of Israeli-Arabs by portraying one man who is literally half Israeli (Jewish) and half Arab, but never both at the same time. Israeli-Arabs are always some degree of both. While not necessarily literally Jewish, they have

[105] Ibid.
[106] Shimony, "Shaping Israeli-Arab Identity," 155.

internalized elements of the majority Israeli-Jewish culture. They speak Hebrew and Arabic, sometimes even mixed together in the same sentence. There are no neat lines separating the components of Israeli-Arabs' identities; the reality is much more complicated. In "Herzl Disappears at Midnight," Kashua excels at simplifying a nuanced concept by representing it in an extreme form. This produces a story that may be easier for Israeli-Jews to accept, though the criticism of Israeli culture comes through clearly.

We can see another example of Kashua's use of absurdity in his third novel, *Second Person Singular*, published in Hebrew in 2010 and translated to English in 2012 by Mitch Ginsburg. The narrative of the novel switches back and forth between two characters: the lawyer, in third person narration; and Amir, in first person. Both are Israeli-Arabs who come from Arab villages but live in Jerusalem. The former is a successful lawyer who assimilates as best he can into Israeli society, adopting western customs like eating expensive sushi and rejecting aspects of his Arab culture. The latter is a young social worker who leads a mostly solitary existence, feeling no connection to his family in the village nor his life in Jerusalem, until he starts caring for Yonatan, a young Jewish man left a vegetative state after an accident. When the lawyer finds a love note in his wife's handwriting in a used book, he becomes convinced that she is having an affair with the book's former owner, whom he deduces to be Yonatan. Over the course of the previous four years, however, Amir slowly adopts Yonatan's entire identity by reading his books, listening to his music, using his camera and clothes. The process culminates in Yonatan's eventual death, which Amir pretends was his own in order to fully assume Yonatan's identity. Amir and the lawyer finally cross paths at the end of the novel when

the lawyer confronts Amir, whom he believes to be Yonatan, with the love note his wife had actually written to Amir years earlier, and Amir is forced to relate his entire story.

The most absurd aspect of the story is Amir fully stealing Yonatan's identity. Kashua builds this plot slowly so that it begins realistically but ends at an absurd extreme. Amir starts by listening to Yonatan's CDs during the nights he cares for him. He wears Yonatan's clothes to a party once and they fit him perfectly. Innocent acts like this begin to snowball when Amir takes Yonatan's camera out of his closet and starts using it, developing a knack for photography, and applies to the prestigious Jerusalem art academy Bezalel under Yonatan's name. Surprisingly, Yonatan's mother Ruchaleh gives Amir her blessing to adopt her son's identity and even treats him as her son. Amir gains acceptance to Bezalel and starts working, studying, and living as Yonatan. The absurdity of this story and that of "Herzl Disappears at Midnight" serve a purpose for Kashua. By taking these stories to their extreme, he removes them from reality enough for the challenging content he presents in them to become palatable for an Israeli-Jewish readership. Similarly, by incorporating humor in his column and television show, he can draw in a wider audience that is receptive to his work, despite its critical message.

Kashua says his use of humor is strategic: "I tell you a joke to have you listen to me, and then maybe I will tell you another joke that we can laugh together and feel equal. And then I will tell you a story hopefully that will make you cry."[107] This idea can be applied to Shammas's strategies as well. Israeli-Arabs, who belong to a marginalized group in Israeli society, need to adopt strategies to be accepted and taken seriously in the

[107] Kashua, "'It's A Surviving Tool'" 2016.

mainstream culture. For Shammas, his mastery of Hebrew and sophisticated postmodern style elevate his novel to a work of art, comparable to the best novels written by Israeli-Jewish authors. Once he has achieved this sense of equality, the critical content of his work can begin to be accepted into the discourse. For Kashua, humor creates a sense of equality between unequal parties and allows him to relate to his Israeli-Jewish readers. This is what allows his work to gain acceptance in the mainstream culture. Shammas and Kashua use different strategies, but the result is the same. Both are able to find their voice within the dominant culture and their critiques can be accepted and heard. The next chapter will look at the similar nature of their criticism and what they seek to accomplish by writing their stories for an Israeli-Jewish audience.

Chapter Three: Criticism of Israel for an Israeli Audience

Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua both seek to tell Israeli-Arab stories and present criticism of Israel for a Hebrew-speaking, mostly Jewish, audience. Their work manages to gain acceptance into the mainstream discourse through the strategies I discuss above. Writing in Hebrew and adopting certain other strategies allow Shammas and Kashua to reach an audience that may not be inclined accept them or even pay them any attention. The two authors adopt different approaches but they share a goal – to participate in mainstream Israeli discourse and make themselves heard. This chapter will focus on the ways in which Shammas and Kashua criticize Israeli society in their work and the implications of their criticism.

JEWISH PERCEPTIONS OF THE ARAB

One clear object of criticism in the work of both Shammas and Kashua is the pervasive Jewish stereotyping and essentializing of Arabs. Both weave these flawed perceptions into their work, calling attention to them as a way of criticizing Israeli culture at large. In *Arabesques,* the narrator Anton Shammas's interactions with the other writers at the International Writing Program in Iowa illustrate these stereotypes. One Palestinian writer, who Shammas nicknames "Paco" because of his cologne, and one Jewish Israeli writer, Yehoshua Bar-On, participate in the program with him. Shammas first meets Bar-On in Paris and they travel to Iowa City together. Bar-On is working on a novel about an Arab. In the first chapter of "The Teller," the narrative switches to Bar-On's perspective

where he thinks: "I'll write about the loneliness of the Palestinian Arab Israeli, which is the greatest loneliness of all."[108] He decides to base his Arab character on Shammas, whom he privately calls "my Jew." He wonders what "that proud Palestinian-Arab-Israeli" would think about this epithet.[109] According to Hever:

> Bar-On's inner monologue derives from both his feeling of genuine empathy with a fellow minority, an empathy based on the similarity between Shammas's situation and that of the Jews as a national minority, and the racist stance of a superior majority, revealed in the unconsciously derogatory use of the phrase 'my Jew.'[110]

Shammas paints Bar-On's character as one who has "empathy" for the Arab struggle, but one who still falls into stereotyping and essentializing Arab identity.

In *Arabesques,* Bar-On is a satirical representation of the liberal wing of the Israeli mainstream. He wants to tell Shammas's story, but he also wants Shammas to fit into his narrow conception of what a "true Arab" is. He thinks: "My Jew will be an educated Arab. But not an intellectual…He speaks and writes excellent Hebrew, but within the bounds of the permissible."[111] When he shares this vision with Shammas, Shammas replies: "We have one little problem. I don't think of myself as what you people call 'an educated Arab.' I'm just another 'intellectual,' as you call your educated Jews."[112] This exemplifies the narrator's refusal to conform to the identity others see for him. He defines Bar-On's expectations of what a real Arab should be. After about a

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[108] Shammas, *Arabesques*, 93.
[109] Ibid, 80.
[110] Hever, *Modern Hebrew Canon*, 185.
[111] Shammas, *Arabesques*, 91.
[112] Ibid, 137.

month in Iowa, Bar-On gives up on Shammas as his subject in favor of Paco, whom he considers "still a pure Palestinian," and who better fills the role of his enemy than Shammas did.[113] Bar-On prefers Paco because his identity is more clearly defined and thus, to him, more authentic and useful in portraying a true Arab. The in-betweenness of Shammas's identity, on the other hand, vexed him. Through these characters, Shammas (the author) provides a salient critique of how even liberal Israeli Jews contribute to the reproduction of a narrow and harmful image of Arabs. Both Shammases, the author and the character, challenge this image.

In Kashua's *Second Person Singular*, Amir discovers some of the stereotypes about Arabs that circulate even in liberal circles of Jews. He is able to infiltrate these elite circles as Yonatan, his stolen Jewish identity. He says:

> At Bezalel, I, a left-wing liberal like most of the students, learned that Arabs are horny, that they think with their dicks…I learned that they can get angry fast and that there is no way to know what might set them off. They're unpredictable and can be aggressive…They think differently, have a different culture, a different logic.[114]

Kashua presents these stereotypes ironically, as if Amir, himself an Arab, is learning about what Arabs are really like from a group of Jewish students at Bezalel. Also ironic is the fact that Amir does not fit any of these stereotypes and in fact fits in seamlessly with the Jews. Despite the stereotype of Arabs as overtly sexual, Amir and the lawyer both have trouble performing sexually or interacting with women. In both *Second Person*

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[113] Ibid, 168.

[114] Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular* [Guf Sheni Yahid], Trans. Mitch Ginsburg (New York: Grove Press, 2012), 284-285.

Singular and *Arabesques*, Kashua and Shammas criticize the stereotyping and essentializing of Arabs in Israeli society and create characters that defy the expectations that the Jewish characters have for them.

PRESSURE TO APPEAR JEWISH

A common motif in Kashua's writing is the Israeli-Arab character who is met with suspicion from Israeli police. When the character outwardly presents as Jewish, however, they avoid such interactions. Kashua himself realized during his teenage years in Jerusalem that if he looked Arab he would be stopped and searched in public by Israeli police, but he could try to seem more Jewish to evade their notice. In Kashua's story "Herzl Disappears at Midnight," Herzl's transformation does not entail any physical change, but he senses that he is being perceived differently at night when he is an Arab versus during the day when he is a Jew. The Israeli border police are more suspicious of him before sunrise, and Herzl wonders how they can tell he's Arab – "maybe a smell, maybe fear."[115] Kashua writes: "Between midnight and sunrise more glances are sent his way. He knows and feels it. He feels looks of hatred and he is gripped by a sense of persecution."[116] Even though he looks the same, Herzl faces more hostility when he is perceived as an Arab than when he is perceived as Jewish.

A similar phenomenon is represented in Kashua's first novel, *Dancing Arabs*, published in 2002 and translated to English by Miriam Shlesinger in 2004. It tells the coming of age story of a young Israeli-Arab narrator growing up in Tira, from childhood

[115] Kashua, "Cinderella," 2006.
[116] Ibid.

through school and to marriage. The narrative is related in a series of short stories and memories that provide a sketch of the narrator's life. He gets admitted to an Israeli boarding school in Jerusalem for gifted students. His family and village are proud of him, but he struggles to do well there at first. The Jewish kids at the school taunt him and the one older Arab student there. He actively tries to act more like the Jewish students so as to stand out less. He falls in love with a Jewish girl at school named Naomi, but they must break up when school ends because she's not allowed to date an Arab. After boarding school, he attends the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and works as an attendant in a mental hospital. In Jerusalem he meets an Israeli-Arab woman, Samia, who is also from Tira and they decide to get married. They have one daughter together before the narrator feels bored and decides he needs a lover. *Dancing Arabs* deals with themes of passing and switching between identities, hiding or faking parts of one's identity in order to fit in and the inner turmoil that results.

As in his other work, aspects of Kashua's own experience are reflected in the story of the narrator. Like Kashua, the narrator of *Dancing Arabs* grows up in Tira and attends a prestigious Israeli boarding school then the Hebrew University. In the narrator's first week in Jerusalem, he is stopped by an Israeli soldier on a bus and searched. The experience is so humiliating and frightening that the narrator decides to assume a more Jewish identity. Of course, this story is based on Kashua's exact real-life experience. The narrator is bullied by the Jewish kids he encounters in Jerusalem, which also encourages him to adopt a Jewish identity. He endeavors to conceal the Arab element of his identity

and more or less succeeds in assimilating into the Jewish culture of his school. The narrator says:

> I look more Israeli than the average Israeli. I'm always pleased when Jews tell me this. 'You don't look Arab at all,' they say. Some people claim it's a racist thing to say, but I've always taken it as a compliment, a sign of success. That's what I've always wanted to be, after all: A Jew. I've worked hard at it, and I've finally pulled it off.[117]

Karen Grumberg highlights the element of performance in the identity of Kashua's narrator and how he is constantly aware of the costume he is wearing in order to successfully pull off the role.[118] The narrator perfects this performance when he is young and it serves him for the rest of his life. One night as violence breaks out in their Jerusalem neighborhood, he and his wife want to leave and go back to Tira. He does not want to be stopped at a roadblock and thinks: "I'm counting on the fact that I look like a Jew. Let's just hope they don't see my wife. Couldn't I have picked someone with a lighter complexion?"[119] He also counts on his nice and sensible Jewish car that he picked specifically for this reason. Passing for Jewish allows him a degree of convenience and acceptance that he would not get if he were perceived as Arab.

Despite the narrator's best efforts, he cannot ever be fully Jewish. He recalls his father's warning:

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[117] Sayed Kashua, *Dancing Arabs* ['Aravim Rokdim], Trans. Miriam Shlesinger, New York: Grove Press (2004), 91.
[118] Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 135.
[119] Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 154.

> My father says, Once an Arab, always an Arab. And he's got a point. He says the Jews can give you the feeling that you're one of them, and you can really like them and think they're the nicest people you've ever known, but sooner or later you realize you don't stand a chance. For them, you'll always be Arab.[120]

In the narrator's relationship with his high school girlfriend, Naomi, this truth becomes apparent. He tells her that he loves her in the eleventh grade, and later she finally admits that she loves him too. They date for eighteen months until the end of school. Both she and the narrator knew that their relationship could not last any longer than that. Naomi told him it was because of her mother, that she did not want her daughter dating an Arab. It was nothing personal, Naomi told the narrator. He says, "it was too bad my name wasn't Reuben or David."[121] While the narrator finds success in passing as Jewish in some aspects of his life, his performance can only do so much to conceal his Arab identity.

Dancing Arabs shows the factors that motivate Israeli-Arabs like Kashua and the narrator to assimilate into the majority Israeli-Jewish identity, and it also shows the limits of assimilation. Kashua holds a mirror to Israeli society, reflecting the cultural hierarchy that all but forces Israeli-Arabs to adopt a more Jewish identity. He shows how the desire to pass for Jewish and the decision about when to perform this identity affects all areas of life for Israeli-Arabs. When the narrator's brother has a baby, they consider naming him after a revolutionary like Nelson Mandela, Che Guevara, or Nasser, and then they consider meaningful Arabic names like Wattan (homeland). Ultimately they settle on

[120] Ibid, 106.
[121] Ibid, 122.

Danny because, they conclude, this name will save him lots of trouble later in life because of its inconspicuousness and Jewishness.[122] Hochberg writes that "'passing' may perhaps offer temporary practical solutions, but it provides little, if any, psychological consolation."[123] While the narrator performs a Jewish identity for reasons of convenience, safety, and belonging, this only exaggerates the identity conflict raging within him. From school through adulthood, he is depressed, unsure of himself, and fundamentally dissatisfied with and alienated from his life. He has adopted this Jewish identity for so long that it is unclear what his true identity is.

We see a similar desire to pass for Jewish in the character of Amir in Kashua's *Second Person Singular*. When Yonatan's mother finds out that Amir is beginning to usurp her son's identity, she casually grants him permission to do so. She says to Amir: "It's like an organ donation. Around here identity is like one of the organs of the body and yours is faulty. You might as well admit it, being an Arab is not exactly the peak of human aspiration."[124] Amir feels the same way. His new Jewish identity as Yonatan allows him convenience and freedom he did not find as Amir. When he was looking for a job, he was only offered dishwasher positions when he applied as himself, but when he applied as Yonatan, he was able to get a more lucrative position as a waiter. When he is spending time with his new Jewish friends from Bezalel, he thinks that he wants to be "Like them. Those who never looked for suspicious glances, whose loyalty was never

[122] Ibid, 226.
[123] Hochberg, "To Be or Not to Be," 76.
[124] Kashua, *Second Person Singular*, 290-291.

questioned, whose acceptance was always taken for granted."[125] All three of these characters in Kashua's work find that it is at least sometimes easier to pass for Jewish. It saves them from confrontation with the arbitrarily hostile Israeli police and allows them better job opportunities. Kashua uses this theme of passing to call attention to the struggles that Israeli-Arabs face that make passing necessary.

EXCLUSION FROM ISRAELI IDENTITY

One of the most important ideas that Shammas and Kashua address in their writing is exclusion of Israeli-Arabs from Israeli identity. Both have asserted their Israeli identity, which is reflected in their choice to write in Hebrew. They constantly contend with those who would exclude them from Israeli identity, insisting that Israeli identity is necessarily Jewish. Their fictional characters face opposition when trying to claim Israeli identity as well.

Hever writes that the character Yehoshua Bar-On in *Arabesques*, who wanted to write about the narrator Shammas when he considered him a "true Arab," is clearly modeled after the prominent Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua.[126] Shammas and Yehoshua carried out a debate in the Israeli press in 1985, before the publication of *Arabesques*, in which Yehoshua famously suggested that Shammas "move one hundred meters east" to Palestine if he wants to realize his full identity and live in a state that reflects that

[125] Ibid, 304.
[126] Hever, *Modern Hebrew Canon*, 184.

identity.[127] Yehoshua and Shammas fundamentally disagree on the relationship between Jewish identity and Israeli identity. To Yehoshua, Israeli identity is the complete realization of Jewish identity. To Shammas, Israeli identity depends on Israeli citizenship and living in the place called Israel.[128] The heart of their differences comes down to who can claim Israeli identity. The New York Times' profile of Shammas records this interaction between Shammas and Yehoshua in a coffee shop in 1988:

> Shammas (tacking): I didn't write an Arab novel, but an Israeli novel.
>
> Yehoshua (countering): You wrote a Palestinian novel, with some aspects Israeli. Written in Hebrew, wonderful Hebrew.
>
> Shammas (lawyerly): What you are saying is that an Arab cannot write a truly Israeli novel. And by extension, an Arab cannot truly participate in the culture or in the state.
>
> Yehoshua (a little hurt): No, Anton, I did not say that. But now you are getting to the core thing. The central thing for me, and I would say for many Jews, is that I see Israel as the implementation of total Jewishness. Israel is not like the United States.
>
> Shammas (softly): I accept your major premise – Israel was formed as a Jewish state. My point is that it cannot go on keeping me here, in a land where I was born, on some sort of identity waiting list. My novel is an Israeli novel, and it is a plea…[129]

In all of his work, Shammas pushes back against those, like Yehoshua, who would argue against his claim on Israeli culture and identity. The use of Hebrew is an essential component of Shammas's mission to express his authentic Israeli identity.

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[127] A. B. Yehoshua in Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 139.
[128] Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates,* 139-141.
[129] Shammas and Yehoshua in Marzorati, "An Arab Voice," 1988.

Writing in Hebrew, for the author Shammas and the narrator Shammas, emphasizes Israeli-ness, which is met with opposition. In *Arabesques*, Shammas brings a Hebrew typewriter to Iowa. At one point it gets stolen, along with all of his papers and drafts of Hebrew stories. He suspects Bar-On or perhaps the Palestinian writer, Paco. It is not revealed who stole the typewriter, but this episode is an interesting symbol. Someone at the program tries to silence him by stealing his typewriter and his work. In reality, Shammas is criticized for his use of Hebrew, both by Palestinians who view it as an act of cultural betrayal and Jewish Israelis who reject his claim on what they view as exclusively their language. He and other Israeli-Arab authors have been relegated to the margins of Hebrew and Israeli literature. The stolen typewriter in *Arabesques* represents the resistance Shammas has faced in making his voice heard.

In the hands of Shammas, Hebrew is a powerful tool. His view towards Hebrew represents his beliefs regarding the State of Israel itself. Speaking of his goals in 1989, Shammas says:

> What I'm trying to do…is to un-Jew the Hebrew language…to make it more Israeli and less Jewish, thus bringing it back to its Semitic origins, to its Place. This is a parallel to what I think the state should be. As English is the language of those who speak it, so is Hebrew; and so the state should be the state of those who live in it, not of those who play with its destiny with a remote control in hand.[130]

Arabesques is a plea by Shammas to be included in the popular conception of Israeli identity in culture. He is not waiting for permission, however, to express himself as fully Israeli. He is boldly taking that identity and claiming it as his own. Brenner writes that

[130] Shammas, "Your Worst Nightmare," 10.

"The adoption of the Hebrew language to tell an Arab story is a relational act that accepts the status of second class citizens and appeals against it at the same time."[131] Acknowledging that, historically, modern Hebrew materialized as part of an effort to keep Israeli identity out of his reach, Shammas undermines these assumptions by writing in Hebrew and loudly expressing his Israeli identity.

In Kashua's second novel, *Let It Be Morning* (published in Hebrew in 2004 and translated to English in 2006 by Miriam Shlesinger), the narrator and all of the people in his village identify as Israeli but face a different kind of effort to exclude them from Israeli identity. The main events of this novel take place within the space of one week, when the narrator's village, an Arab village in Israel, was surrounded by Israeli soldiers and tanks and cut off from water, electricity and phone service. The narrator had recently decided to move back to his village in Tira after an incident in 2000, during the Second Intifada, where thirteen Israeli-Arabs were shot by Israeli police while demonstrating in support of Palestinians. He feels he and his family will be safer in the Arab village, where his parents, in-laws, and brothers still live. The narrator works for an Israeli paper and had used his Arab identity and language skills to report from Arab villages about demonstrations and write about them for a Hebrew-speaking audience. With the tense political situation, however, he senses that the newspaper trusts him less and less and begins giving him fewer and fewer assignments. All of this contributes to his decision to move his family from Tel Aviv back to their village. Soon after arriving, however, chaos ensues. When the village is suddenly surrounded by Israeli tanks and all exits are closed

[131] Brenner, "Search for Identity," 103.

off, the villagers wait for an explanation but do not receive one. In the days that follow, food and water become scarce and the villagers begin to turn on one another.

The resolution of the novel comes when, days later, electricity returns, the tanks retreat, and the villagers learn what the incident was about. It is revealed that Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed a peace treaty that involved some exchanges of territory. Israel would annex some settlement blocks and give the Palestinian Authority proportionate amounts of Israeli land in return. The narrator slowly grasps that his village is one of the areas that has been handed over to the Palestinian Authority. All of the villagers are left wondering what to do next and how this affects their everyday reality.

Let It Be Morning highlights the narrator's inability to fit into either the Israeli-Jewish community in Tel Aviv or the Arab community of his village. He and his wife do not feel at home in the village. They do not relate to the "authentically" Palestinian identity that the gangsters in their village try to perform through violent behavior.[132] However, they also were beginning to feel threatened in their Jewish neighborhood in Tel Aviv. The narrator thought moving back to the village would make them safer and more comfortable. He says: "I hate myself for thinking that coming back to the village would solve anything. For some reason, I thought that if I was surrounded by people like myself, my own people, nothing bad could happen to me."[133] The novel calls into question whether the villagers actually are the narrator's own people. Like Kashua's other protagonists, the narrator of *Let It Be Morning* struggles to reconcile the Israeli part of his

[132] Grumberg, *Place and Ideology,* 154.
[133] Sayed Kashua, *Let It Be Morning* [Va-yehi Boker], Trans. Miriam Shlesinger, New York: Black Cat (2006), 170.

identity with the Arab part. He does not feel at home among other Arabs, but he is forced out of his Tel Aviv neighborhood, where he is seen as an outsider rather than as an Israeli citizen.

In his career, the narrator's multifaceted identity sometimes proves helpful. The newspaper uses him to cover Arab stories that a Jewish reporter would not be able to cover. He needs to write about them in Hebrew, though, and represent Arab stories for a mostly Jewish audience. This is exactly what Kashua does with his novels and columns. Again, the protagonist shares elements of Kashua's own identity. What had been an advantage for the narrator turned into a disadvantage when the Israeli landscape became overcome by violence in 2000. He says:

> Suddenly my life as an outsider, which had had its advantages, began to get in my way. My being an outsider was what had qualified me for my job and my position, and had given me the language in which I was expert enough to work as a journalist. My being an outsider was beginning to put my life in danger.[134]

The elements of his identity which had allowed him to advance in his career became a hindrance to his career, as the newspaper began to push him to the margins. However, once it becomes clear at the end of the novel that the narrator now lives in the new Palestinian state, his editor once again values him and needs him to be the paper's man on the inside, reporting back.[135] From the perspective of Israeli society, represented here by the newspaper and its readership, different aspects of the narrator's identity are more or less valuable for different tasks, which forces him to emphasize or conceal parts of his

[134] Ibid, 19.
[135] Ibid, 270.

identity and value one part over another. The newspaper never sees him as an insider, as he would like to be seen, but rather as an outsider who is sometimes valuable for certain tasks.

The narrator's village reflects a group of Israeli-Arabs who "not only resigned themselves to being citizens of Israel, they even grew to like their citizenship and were worried that it might be taken away from them."[136] They identify more with Israel than the Arab world. At the end of the novel, their fears are realized when the lose their Israeli citizenship overnight and become citizens of a new Palestinian state. No one knows how to process this turn of events. On the morning when they find out, the narrator tells his wife, "I think we're Palestinian now," and she asks, "Does that mean we have school today?"[137] While their citizenship changes, their identity remains complicated. Grumberg writes that the Israeli-Arab village "has been pushed out of the hallucinatory space of no-man's-land and into the clear cartography of the new Palestine," but this does not solve the question of the narrator's and the villagers' identity. [138] For decades the villagers grew accustomed to their Israeli citizenship and the benefits it provided them, and came to identify with Israeli culture even if it did not completely accept them. This process distanced them from Palestine and the rest of the Arab world, but suddenly they are reabsorbed into it. What should simplify a complicated identity crisis only exacerbates it, creating a new hyphenated identity of Arab-Israeli-Arabs, those who are now nominally Palestinian but still claim, at least in part, Israeli identity.

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[136] Ibid, 108.
[137] Ibid, 266.
[138] Grumberg, *Place and Ideology,* 155.

The narrators in *Arabesques* and *Let It Be Morning* feel strongly attached to their Israeli identity. In the case of *Let It Be Morning,* the narrator never felt fully accepted by Israeli society but when his Israeli citizenship is suddenly ripped away from him, he feels lost. Shammas, the narrator, in *Arabesques* faces resistance from both directions when he tries to claim Israeli identity by expressing himself in Hebrew. These stories represent the real resistance that Shammas and Kashua face in trying to claim a piece of Israeli identity for themselves. I have shown how these two authors are profoundly different in several ways, but both experience exclusion from Israeli identity despite being widely read and accepted in Israeli culture. They are still seen as not fully belonging. This is one of the critiques they present in their work, in addition to their criticism of popular Israeli stereotypes of Arabs and the conditions in Israeli society that compel Arabs to try to pass for Jewish. The objective that Shammas and Kashua share is to represent these harsh truths for an Israeli-Jewish audience.

Conclusion

Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua are often analyzed as two different types of authors. I have argued here for reading them together as two cases of the same phenomenon: Israeli-Arab authors who are critical of Israel but write for a Hebrew-speaking audience and take measures to make their work palatable to this group. Shammas achieves this by writing in an elevated Hebrew that is beyond reproach and a sophisticated postmodern style. Kashua incorporates humor and absurd plots into his writing in addition to utilizing other media such as television and journalism. Both manage to gain entrance to mainstream Israeli discourse while criticizing Israeli society, and both engage Israeli Jews with their critical work.

Does the fact that the work of Shammas and Kashua is largely accepted and appreciated in Israeli culture speak to the negate their critiques? Rachel Feldhay Brenner suggests that this "inclusion downplays and thus neutralizes the writer's critical ideas concerning the state and ideology. After all, the system that recognized the Arab writer who has defied it so harshly cannot be totally evil."[139] One of the main problems that Shammas and Kashua present is the resistance they face in claiming Israeli identity. If their work is so widely accepted, however, how does that criticism hold up? I argue that Shammas and Kashua have found ways to make their work appealing to the Israeli-Jewish majority and this allows their critiques to be heard. The acceptance of their work does not negate the reality of everyday exclusion they have faced in Israel. The extent to

[139] Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 124.

which their critical message is understood and appreciated by their readers, however, is unclear. More research would be necessary to understand to what extent the criticisms that Shammas and Kashua present are internalized by their readers who do not share their experiences.

Despite the acceptance of their work, Shammas and Kashua face resistance when it comes to their Israeli identity. Gideon Levy, an Israeli opinions writer for *Haaretz*, wrote a piece in which he condescendingly calls Sayed Kashua a "good Arab, whom Israelis so love to love."[140] He considers Kashua as well as his character Amjad, from his show *Arab Labor,* to fit this definition of the "good Arab," whom Israelis love because "they make us laugh in Hebrew."[141] He concludes by stating there is no place for Kashua in Israel, the Jewish state. In Kashua's response, he writes that he always viewed Amjad as a tragic character because he "does all he can to be accepted into white Israel but in every episode he's rejected and cast out, the door slammed in his face."[142] As we have seen, all of Kashua's characters experience this kind of exclusion in one form or another. Shammas's protagonist faces similar resistance when he tries to express his Israeli identity. It is clear that the authors themselves have experienced this resistance too. Both authors have aimed to make their work acceptable to the dominant culture without sacrificing their critical message. Kashua thus concludes his response to Levy: "I

[140] Gideon Levy, "The Jewish State Has No More Room for 'Good Arabs,'" *Haaretz*, June 11, 2015.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Sayed Kashua, "Is It a Problem That Sayed Kashua Is the Arab Israelis Love to Love?" *Haaretz*, June 18, 2015.

apologize for trying to speak in the language of the majority, without ever compromising any opinion I hold."[143]

[143] Ibid.

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